

Step 4: Answer using Process of Elimination Remember that you want something that helps the conclusion here.

- (A) Loud music is most dangerous to hearing when it is played through stereo headphones. 

Does this show that the parents' solution won't work? This is not relevant because it doesn't matter whether listening through headphones is the most dangerous. The argument does not compare different methods of listening to music. Eliminate this one.

- (B) No other cause of hearing loss in teenagers is as damaging as their listening to loud music through stereo headphones. 

Does this show that the parents' solution won't work? This choice would strengthen a causal argument (no other cause) but since that reasoning isn't in play in this argument this choice doesn't work. Eliminate it.

- (C) Parents of teenagers generally do not themselves listen to loud music through stereo headphones. 

Does this show that the parents' solution won't work? Be careful not to fall into the trap of thinking that if the parents don't listen to their own advice then neither will their teenagers. This isn't about common sense; it's about what you can prove from the information in the argument. This does not work without a lot of justification, so get rid of it.

- (D) Teenagers who now listen to music at dangerously loud levels choose to do so despite their awareness of the risks involved. 

Does this show that the parents' solution won't work? If the teenagers are aware of the risk and want to listen to dangerously loud music anyway, then this shows that they are unlikely to buy the new headphones. This rules out the possibility that perhaps the teens were unaware of the danger. Keep this choice for now.

- (E) A few headphone manufacturers already plan to market stereo headphones that automatically turn off when a dangerous level of loudness is reached. 

Does this show that the parents' solution won't work? The author thinks that teenagers won't buy the headphones. If the manufacturers already plan to sell the safe headphones, then they think people will buy them. If anything, this strengthens the parents' position and weakens the author's. The problem is that there still isn't any direct link between making the headphones and getting teens to use them, or show the teens won't use them.

Careful!

Watch out for Weaken answers on Strengthen questions, and vice versa.



Principle Strengthen

Another type of Strengthen question asks you to find a “principle” to “justify” the argument. This time, instead of a specific fact or piece of evidence, the correct answer will be a general rule that will strengthen the argument as a whole. These tend to prove the conclusion is true, very much like sufficient assumption questions. The answer may help the conclusion in an unexpected or rather extreme way, so don’t shy away from answers that are strongly worded.

The Argument

8. In order to expand its mailing lists for e-mail advertising, the Outdoor Sports Company has been offering its customers financial incentives if they provide the e-mail addresses of their friends. However, offering such incentives is an unethical business practice, because it encourages people to exploit their personal relationships for profit, which risks damaging the integrity of those relationships.

Which one of the following principles, if valid, most helps to justify the reasoning in the argument?

- (A) It is unethical for people to exploit their personal relationships for profit if in doing so they risk damaging the integrity of those relationships. 
- (B) If it would be unethical to use information that was gathered in a particular way, then it is unethical to gather that information in the first place. 
- (C) It is an unethical business practice for a company to deliberately damage the integrity of its customers’ personal relationships in any way. 
- (D) It is unethical to encourage people to engage in behavior that could damage the integrity of their personal relationships. 
- (E) Providing a friend’s personal information to a company in exchange for a financial reward will almost certainly damage the integrity of one’s personal relationship with that friend. 

Assess

There are two kinds of Principle questions. Some ask you to “justify” or strengthen the conclusion. Some ask for a principle that “conforms” or matches information (see Lesson 10). When the question asks you to justify a conclusion, be sure to find the conclusion and premises.

PrepTest 56, Section 2, Question 16

Here’s How to Crack It

Step 1: Assess the question As always, look at the question first.

Which one of the following principles, if valid, most helps to justify the reasoning in the argument?

Now you’re looking to “justify”—basically, to strengthen—the argument about Outdoor Sports Company. Notice how the question also includes the proviso “if

valid,” just as a Strengthen question would include “if true.” Remember that your choices are going to be generally worded rules rather than specific facts.

Step 2: Analyze the argument Just as you would on a Strengthen question, analyze the argument by finding the conclusion (the judgment you’re looking to justify) and the premises (the circumstances involved). You’ll also want to see if you can find a conspicuous gap in the reasoning. Take a look at the argument.

In order to expand its mailing lists for e-mail advertising, the Outdoor Sports Company has been offering its customers financial incentives if they provide the e-mail addresses of their friends. However, offering such incentives is an unethical business practice, because it encourages people to exploit their personal relationships for profit, which risks damaging the integrity of those relationships.

Here’s how to break it down:

- Author’s conclusion: *...offering such incentives is an unethical business practice.*
- Author’s premises: *[financial incentives to provide a friend’s email address] encourages people to exploit their personal relationships for profit...*
- Author’s assumption: *The argument never explicitly links the premise that exploiting a personal relationship for profit and risking damage to a relationship with the conclusion about a business practice being unethical. The argument assumes that causing a customer to risk the integrity of a friendship for profit is unethical.*

Step 3: Act You’re looking for an answer that supports the position that it is unethical to cause a customer to risk the integrity of a relationship. The credited response will probably do this by somehow connecting the *threat* of doing harm to the *act* of doing harm.

Step 4: Answer using Process of Elimination Make sure you take each answer choice back to the argument and see whether it supports the conclusion. Since you’re looking for an answer that justifies, or proves, the conclusion, the stronger the answer choice, the better.

(A)

It is unethical for people to exploit their personal relationships for profit if in doing so they risk damaging the integrity of those relationships.



Does this prove that a financial incentive for customers to exploit a personal relationship is unethical? This choice focuses on the ethics of the customer instead of the business. Eliminate this answer.

(B)

If it would be unethical to use information that was gathered in a particular way, then it is unethical to gather that information in the first place.



Does this prove that a financial incentive for customers to exploit a personal rela-



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relationship is unethical? This choice makes the unethical business practice predicated on the use of the data after the fact, but the argument does not address whether using the data is unethical or not. Eliminate this answer choice.

 (C)

It is an unethical business practice for a company to deliberately damage the integrity of its customers' personal relationships in any way. 

Does this prove that a financial incentive for customers to exploit a personal relationship is unethical? Maybe—take a close look at this one. The choice certainly connects the business practice to a customer damaging the integrity of a personal relationship. But check the argument again to make sure it is the same. The argument says it is unethical because a person *risks* damaging the integrity of a personal relationship and it never mentions whether the company is doing so *deliberately*. This is one way that Principle Strengthen questions can be tricky. Eliminate this answer.

(D)

It is unethical to encourage people to engage in behavior that could damage the integrity of their personal relationships. 

Does this prove that a financial incentive for customers to exploit a personal relationship is unethical? Since the author claims the business practice would cause a customer to exploit a personal relationship and risk damaging the integrity of that relationship, it seems the answer is yes. Keep this answer.

 (E)

Providing a friend's personal information to a company in exchange for a financial reward will almost certainly damage the integrity of one's personal relationship with that friend. 

Does this prove that a financial incentive for customers to exploit a personal relationship is unethical? Not quite. This proves the risk of a customer damaging a relationship is almost certain, but does not address whether that makes the business practice mentioned in the argument *unethical*. Eliminate this choice.

This means the credited response to this Principle Strengthen question is (D).

Understanding Principle Strengthen Questions

In Principle Strengthen questions, a principle that “justifies” the conclusion may legitimately help the conclusion using a method that’s a little different from the one in the original argument. Make sure you know what kind of Principle question you are dealing with: Principle Strengthen question or Principle Match, which requires a somewhat different method.

What If I Can't Find an Assumption?

We've been talking quite a bit about what an important role the assumptions play in weakening or strengthening arguments on the LSAT. You may be asking yourself, “What am I supposed to do if I can't find an assumption?” Well, there's still hope. Finding assumptions is one of the trickier skills for

many students to develop. In addition to identifying the purpose structure and looking for the common flawed patterns of reasoning, here are two ideas to keep in mind.

First, look for any shifts in the author's language. Anytime the author makes a conclusion, evaluate that conclusion *only* on the basis of the evidence you're given in support of that conclusion. If there are any changes in language between the premises and the conclusion, these changes clue you into assumptions. This shift can be blatant, as when something that was never mentioned before suddenly shows up in the conclusion. Or it can be more subtle, such as if the author makes a statement that is more strongly qualified than the evidence. For instance, if you had evidence about what "almost always" is the case and concluded something that "will" happen, that would require a leap in logic.

Remember also that arguments can have multiple assumptions. Even if you identify an assumption correctly, it might not be the "right" one (meaning it might not be the one the credited response hinges on).

What if you can't articulate an assumption, or you find the "wrong" one? Don't worry; there's *still* hope. As we've been saying, you should approach the answer choices with an assumption or at least an understanding of the gap between the conclusion and premises. This is because it's not necessary for you to be able to *generate* the assumption to find the best answer. You can also be prepared to *recognize* an assumption (or an answer that will impact it, in the case of Weaken and Strengthen questions). Sure, you might find that you can get through POE more quickly if you have a neatly paraphrased assumption jotted down, but if you've at least identified any gaps in the argument, you'll be able to evaluate the answer choices and recognize the ones that don't have the proper impact.

Arguments Technique: What to Do When You're Down to Two

As you do more LSAT arguments, you may find yourself falling into a predictable pattern in which you find it easy to eliminate three of the answer choices but then have no clear idea of which one of the two remaining choices is correct. There's the first problem. You should know that it isn't your job to determine which is the *correct* answer. The trickiest incorrect answers on LSAT arguments are usually mostly right—they contain just a word or two that makes them wrong.

Very often these wrong answers will even sound better than the "credited response." The writers of the LSAT are experts at writing answers that are *almost* all correct, so if you spot anything that makes the choice wrong, even one word, eliminate it.

Now, what do you do when you get down to two choices? Well, you focus on finding something that makes one of them incorrect. There must be something appealing about each of them, or you would have eliminated one of them by now.



Here are a few steps to follow when you are down to two choices.

1. Identify how the answer choices are different.
2. Go back to the argument and reread, keeping the difference in mind. Use the difference that you've spotted to help you read the argument from a new, critical perspective. Try to find something in the language of the argument that points out a problem with one of the remaining two choices. Focus on the statement of the conclusion; this is very often what makes the final decision, especially if you didn't read it closely enough the first time.
3. Eliminate the choice with the flaw. Now that you've found the problem, eliminate that choice and move on.

This process will work on any type of Argument question—and, for that matter, on Games and Reading Comprehension. Be critical and methodical, and you'll get results.

Summary: Strengthen Questions

With Strengthen questions, you once again looked for what impact each of the answer choices had on the argument—only this time, a favorable impact. Focus on finding the flaws that allow you to eliminate the attractive wrong answers and leave you with the only choice that has a direct impact on the argument. Look at the chart below.

Sample Question Phrasings	Act
<i>Which one of the following statements, if true, would most support the author's conclusion?</i>	Identify the conclusion, premises, and assumptions of the author.
<i>Which one of the following statements, if true, would strengthen the author's argument?</i>	Read critically, looking for where the author made large leaps in logic.
<i>Which one of the following principles, if established, justifies the actions taken by Mia in the argument above?</i>	- Then, when you go to the answer choices, look for a choice that has the most positive impact on that gap. - Assume all choices to be hypothetically true.

Careful!

Not all questions that use the word support are Strengthen questions. Strengthen questions ask you to support the argument's conclusion, but Inference questions ask you to use the passage to support an answer choice.



Your goal will be to spot an answer choice that resolves or explains the discrepancy or paradox.

LESSON 6: RESOLVE/EXPLAIN QUESTIONS

So far, you've been working with arguments in which the author has presented evidence to support a conclusion. And with the exception of Main Point questions, you've been paying attention to any gaps in the argument that might help you to pinpoint the assumptions the author has made. The process for analyzing the argument (Step 2) has been almost identical for Main Point, Assumption, Weaken, and Strengthen question types.

Step 2 is a bit different in answering Resolve/Explain questions. That's because the "argument" attached to these questions is more like a passage. With these types of questions, the author will present a couple of pieces of information that don't seem to fit together. Your task will be to find the answer choice that will do the best job of *resolving* the apparent discrepancy between these two pieces of information and that will *explain* how both pieces of information could be true at once. The other steps remain the same; you just don't have the same pieces to break down what you've seen so far.

Look at a typical passage that would be used in asking a Resolve/Explain question.

The ancient Dirdirs used water power for various purposes in the outlying cities and towns in their empire. However, they did not use this technology in their capital city of Avallone.

Notice that there's no evidence provided to support a particular claim, just two pieces of information that don't really seem to fit with each other. Here you've got this ancient culture that has this certain type of technology but doesn't use it in the capital city. That's the discrepancy or paradox, right? Good. Your goal then will be to spot an answer choice that in some way resolves or explains that discrepancy or paradox. You might be able to think up a few reasons the Dirdirs had this technology and didn't use it, such as the following:

- There were no rivers or other bodies of water in or near Avallone.
- It was cheaper or more efficient to use another source of power in the capital, such as abundant labor.
- There was not enough space for the equipment in Avallone.

That's good for a start. You could actually come up with a multitude of theoretical reasons they didn't use this technology (the actual historical reason has something to do with the fact that it would have caused social unrest because this technology would have put too many people out of work), but the nice thing is that you don't have to come up with reasons! All you have to do is identify the discrepancy and be able to recognize the answer choice that allows both parts of the discrepancy to be true. That'll save you a lot of work and keep you from generating ideas that are far away from what the test-writers were thinking when they wrote the question. Now you will put this idea to work on a full question.

The Argument

9. In the past, combining children of different ages in one classroom was usually a failure; it resulted in confused younger children, who were given inadequate attention and instruction, and bored older ones, who had to sit through previously learned lessons. Recently, however, the practice has been revived with excellent results. Mixed-age classrooms today are stimulating to older children and enable younger children to learn much more efficiently than in standard classrooms.

Which one of the following, if true, most helps to resolve the apparent discrepancy in the passage?

- (A) On average, mixed-age classrooms today are somewhat larger in enrollment than were the ones of the past. 
- (B) Mixed-age classrooms of the past were better equipped than are those of today. 
- (C) Today's mixed-age classrooms, unlike those of the past, emphasize group projects that are engaging to students of different ages. 
- (D) Today's mixed-age classrooms have students of a greater range of ages than did those of the past. 
- (E) Few of the teachers who are reviving mixed-age classrooms today were students in mixed-age classrooms when they were young. 

PrepTest 44, Section 2, Question 3

Here's How to Crack It

Step 1: Assess the question

Here it is again.

Which one of the following, if true, most helps to resolve the apparent discrepancy in the passage?

This question is tipping your hand—it's telling you that there is something you need to *resolve* in the *passage*. When the question stem doesn't use the word "argument," you are not looking for any gaps in the reasoning. The information in the passage contains a *discrepancy* or *paradox*, and you're going to have to find an answer choice that resolves these seemingly opposing facts.

Analyze

There's no need to find the conclusion and premises on Resolve/Explain questions.

Step 2: Analyze the argument Read through the argument, looking for any situations or facts that seem contrary to one another. Here it is again.

In the past, combining children of different ages in one classroom was usually a failure; it resulted in confused younger children, who were given inadequate attention and instruction, and bored older ones, who had to sit through previously learned lessons. Recently, however, the practice has been revived with excellent results. Mixed-age classrooms today are stimulating to older children and enable younger children to learn much more efficiently than in standard classrooms.

What is the apparent discrepancy? In the past, mixed-age classrooms were not successful, but now they are.

Step 3: Act Remember that there are probably a number of specific theories we could come up with to explain this discrepancy, and if one possible explanation jumps into your head, that's fine—it may turn out to be an answer choice. But fundamentally, you just need to be aware of the *discrepancy* and see what impact, if any, each of the answer choices will have on it.

The credited response to a Resolve/Explain question will be a hypothetically true statement that explains how all aspects of the paradox or discrepancy can be true.

Step 4: Answer using Process of Elimination Just as with Weaken and Strengthen answer choices, you first have to accept each of the answer choices here as facts, and then apply them to the argument. One of these facts, when added to the argument, will resolve the apparent paradox, or explain the supposed discrepancy.

Let's see which one of the following choices does this.

~~A~~

On average, mixed-age classrooms today are somewhat larger in enrollment than were the ones of the past.

~~B~~

Does this explain why mixed-age classrooms were not successful but now are? No. A larger class size does not resolve the discrepancy in success. Eliminate it.

- ☒ B Mixed-age classrooms of the past were better equipped than are those of today. 

Does this explain why mixed-age classrooms were not successful but now are? If mixed-age classrooms of the past were better equipped, then why would the new mixed-age classrooms be more successful? This makes the discrepancy worse. Get rid of it.

- ☐ C Today's mixed-age classrooms, unlike those of the past, emphasize group projects that are engaging to students of different ages. 

Does this explain why mixed-age classrooms were not successful but now are? Notice how this answer sets up a contrast between the student activities in today's mixed-age classrooms and those of the past. If the projects are engaging to students of different ages, then this could explain why today's classrooms are more successful. Keep this one.

- ☒ D Today's mixed-age classrooms have students of a greater range of ages than did those of the past. 

Does this explain why mixed-age classrooms were not successful but now are? A wider age range does not clear up the difference in the success of the new classrooms versus the old ones. Eliminate it.

- ☒ E Few of the teachers who are reviving mixed-age classrooms today were students in mixed-age classrooms when they were young. 

Does this explain why mixed-age classrooms were not successful but now are? Whether the teachers attended mixed-age classes is not relevant to the change in success. Eliminate it.

Some people find this type of question challenging because they can see how more than one of the answers could work. If this sounds like something you do, remember to follow the process and be crystal clear what you need the credited response to do. Asking yourself the same question as you do POE—in this case, “Does this explain why mixed-age classrooms were not successful but now are?”—will help you stay focused on the task at hand. If you find yourself wanting to justify any of the answers by supplying additional information to make them work, they are wrong and you need to eliminate them.



Arguments Technique: Using Process of Elimination with Resolve/Explain Questions

In using Process of Elimination (POE) with Resolve/Explain questions, you should remember that the correct answer will be some explanation that will allow *both* of the facts from the passage to be true. In the Dirdir question, the two facts were (1) they had water power, and (2) they did not use this technology in their capital city. In the mixed-age classrooms passage, the facts were (1) mixed-age classrooms in the past were usually a failure, and (2) mixed-age classrooms today are successful. The correct answer in each case allowed each of these facts to be true independently of the other and allowed both to make sense together.

Additionally, note that the phrasing of most Resolve/Explain questions contains the clause “if true.” Your methodology should be exactly the same here as it is with Weaken and Strengthen questions—you assume each of the five answer choices to be hypothetically true and look for the impact of each one on the discrepancy. In the case of Resolve/Explain questions, the impact will relate to whether or not or how well the choice resolves an apparent discrepancy.

Summary:

Resolve/Explain Questions

With Resolve/Explain questions, the only thing you must find before going to the answer choices is the apparent discrepancy or paradox. Remember that you have to work under the belief that the answers are true, regardless of how unreasonable they may seem. Evaluate what impact the answer choice would have on the discrepancy *if it were true*. Finally, look to see which one of the answer choices allows both of the facts or sides in the passage to be true at the same time. Only one of them will do this.

Sample Question Phrasings	Act
<i>Which one of the following provides the best resolution to the apparent paradox described by the committee member?</i> <i>Which of the following statements, if true, would explain the discrepancy found by the scientists?</i>	• Identify the apparent discrepancy or paradox. • Go to the answer choices and look for a piece of information that, when added to the information given, allows both facts from the passage to be true. • Assume all choices to be hypothetically true.



LESSON 7: INFERENCE QUESTIONS

Like the arguments attached to Resolve/Explain questions, most Inference arguments are not written in the familiar *conclusion supported by premises* format. Instead, they will be passages that may or may not seem to be headed somewhere. And the test-writers will ask you to find a piece of information that either must be true, based on the information provided in the argument, or will be best supported by the argument. That something can come from anywhere in the passage and doesn't have to come from anything important.

Here are a few tips right off the bat. You can't use any information that is not included in the passage, you don't have to find the main conclusion, and you have to pay very close attention to any qualifying language (*most, always, each, few, might*) that is used. Ready to put this information to work? Then let's get to it.

The Argument

10. Artists have different ways of producing contours and hatching, and analysis of these stylistic features can help to distinguish works by a famous artist both from forgeries and from works genuinely by other artists. Indeed, this analysis has shown that many of the drawings formerly attributed to Michelangelo are actually by the artist Giulio Clovio, Michelangelo's contemporary.

If the statements above are true, then which one of the following must also be true?

- (A) Contours and hatching are the main features that distinguish the drawing styles of different artists. 
- (B) Many of the drawings formerly attributed to Michelangelo are actually forgeries. 
- (C) No forgery can perfectly duplicate the contour and hatching styles of a famous artist. 
- (D) The contour and hatching styles used to identify the drawings of Clovio cited can be shown to be features of all Clovio's works. 
- (E) There is an analyzable difference between Clovio's contour and hatching styles and those of Michelangelo. 

PrepTest 44, Section 4, Question 15

Here's How to Crack It

Step 1: Assess the question Inference questions can be worded in several ways. Here's a common one.

If the statements above are true, then which one of the following must also be true?

You're looking for something that's an absolutely 100 percent airtight logical consequence of the material presented in the argument, which as you can see in this case is more like a short descriptive passage.

Step 2: Analyze the argument Sometimes on Inference questions there isn't a lot of analysis you can do. In those cases, just read the passage and do a quick paraphrase of the information given. Most often, these passages are not arguments, though when they are you still have to treat all the parts as true and not look for gaps in the reasoning. Sometimes there are a series of statements that appear to be begging to be put together. Look at the passage again.

Artists have different ways of producing contours and hatching, and analysis of these stylistic features can help to distinguish works by a famous artist both from forgeries and from works genuinely by other artists. Indeed, this analysis has shown that many of the drawings formerly attributed to Michelangelo are actually by the artist Giulio Clovio, Michelangelo's contemporary.

Focus on the facts in this passage, and paraphrase them so you can more readily recognize any connections.

- Fact 1: *Analysis of certain stylistic features can help distinguish who the artist is.*
- Fact 2: *This analysis helped to show that some art is Clovio's instead of Michelangelo's.*

An inference is something you can prove from the information given. It is not to be confused with an assumption, which doesn't need proof. Once you have paraphrased the facts, look to see what you know to be true on the basis of them. If you notice a logical progression leading to a particular conclusion, it always pays to go ahead and combine the facts for yourself before you do POE. So, what do you know for sure from the facts above?

- *Artists stylistic features are different enough that they can be used to help identify who made the art.*
- *Since the analysis was used to differentiate between Clovio's work and Michelangelo's, there must be some differences between Clovio's style and Michelangelo's style.*

Analyze

Do not look for the conclusion and premises on Inference questions.

Step 3: Act These conclusions are very likely to figure into the right answer somehow, which is why you should bother to paraphrase the passage and look for them in the first place.

The credited response to an Inference question is the statement best supported by the passage.

Step 4: Answer using Process of Elimination When using POE on Inference question answers, look at the choices with an open mind. It is sometimes hard to predict exactly what inference will be in the answers. Combining facts is one way to make inferences on the LSAT, or sometimes the test-writers will make an inference by just taking a small logical step away from something said in the passage. Take each choice on its own merits and always go back to the passage for *proof!*

☐ A

Contours and hatching are the main features that distinguish the drawing styles of different artists.



The passage mentions contours and hatching as examples of stylistic features, but it does not claim that these are the *main* features that distinguish artists' works. This choice is more specific and more demanding than our original, so eliminate the choice.

☐ B

Many of the drawings formerly attributed to Michelangelo are actually forgeries.



A forgery is a fake meant to be passed off as an original work of art. Many Michelangelo works have now been attributed to Clovio, but there is no proof in the passage that those works were forgeries. You should eliminate this choice.

☐ C

No forgery can perfectly duplicate the contour and hatching styles of a famous artist.



The passage states that stylistic differences "help to distinguish" works, which is not the same as claiming that no forgery can perfectly duplicate an artist's style. This goes too far, so eliminate it.

☐ D

The contour and hatching styles used to identify the drawings of Clovio cited can be shown to be features of all Clovio's works.



There is no evidence in the passage that all of Clovio's works had the same style features. Be careful not to make an assumption here! All you know for sure is that the stylistic features are unique and that the styles of Clovio and Michelangelo are different. If you can't prove it, you can't choose it! Since you don't have enough information to prove this, eliminate it.

- (E) There is an analyzable difference between Clovio's contour and hatching styles and those of Michelangelo.



Here, at last, is the inference we came up with in the first place. Because some of Michelangelo's works have been reattributed to Clovio using analysis of contour and hatching styles, there must be a discernible difference. This is the choice you want.

Arguments Technique: Look for Extreme Language

Do you remember the Process of Elimination techniques used to get rid of wrong answer choices in Main Point questions in Lesson 1? They included relevance, opposites, and extreme language. Relevance is still certainly an issue with Inference questions because if there is something in an answer choice that wasn't mentioned in the argument, there's no way you could have inferred it from the information presented. However, when it comes to Inference questions, extreme wording (as you saw in some of the answers in the previous examples) plays a key role. It is much easier to say that something is *usually* true than to say that something is *always* true. It is much more difficult to back up the second phrase. Take a look at another example.

1. Most literature professors are skilled readers.
2. All literature professors are skilled readers.

There's only one difference between these two sentences: one has the word *most*; the other has the word *all*. Yet there is a vast difference between these two statements. Certainly, anyone who has reached such a high position has done more than her fair share of reading. Very rigorous standards must be met and outstanding academic performance must be demonstrated. This requires a ton of reading. It's reasonable to think that if someone's doing that much reading, he or she is probably a skilled reader. But if you were asked which of those statements *must be true*, you would have to eliminate the second statement. It would be incredibly difficult to prove that *all* literature professors are skilled readers. It would take only *one* person who never really liked to read, but was driven to this level of success for other reasons, to disprove the second statement. It would be much easier to prove the first statement because it leaves a lot more room for a few exceptions to the general rule. Both statements involve strong wording, but the second is *too* strong.



It's much easier to prove that something is usually true than it is to prove that something is always true.

Take a look at the following chart.

Safely Vague		Dangerously Extreme	
might	possible	always	not
could	usually	never	positively
may	sometimes	at no time	absolutely
can	at least once	must	unequivocally
some	frequently	will	every
		all	

The sample Inference question you just worked through asked you to find the answer choice that could be “properly inferred,” in other words, the one that *must be true* based on the information in the argument. Other Inference questions will require a slightly different task. Rather than finding the answer that must be true, you will be asked to find the one that would be best supported by the information in the argument. This may seem like a subtle difference, but it is important to pay attention to nuances in language such as this on the LSAT. Let’s take a look at how these work.

The Argument

11. Coffee and tea contain methylxanthines, which cause temporary increases in the natural production of vasopressin, a hormone produced by the pituitary gland. Vasopressin causes clumping of blood cells, and the clumping is more pronounced in women than in men. This is probably the explanation of the fact that women face as much as a tenfold higher risk than men do of complications following angioplasty, a technique used to clear clogged arteries.

Which one of the following statements is most strongly supported by the information above?

- (A) Men, but not women, should be given methylxanthines prior to undergoing angioplasty. 
- (B) In spite of the risks, angioplasty is the only effective treatment for clogged arteries. 
- (C) Women probably drink more coffee and tea, on average, than do men. 
- (D) Prior to undergoing angioplasty, women should avoid coffee and tea. 
- (E) Angioplasty should not be used to treat clogged arteries. 

PrepTest 44, Section 4, Question 12

Here's How to Crack It

Step 1: Assess the question Make sure that you're clear about your task. Notice that the question stem makes no mention of an argument—that's a classic sign that this is an Inference question. This question asks us to find the answer that is "most strongly supported" by the information in the passage. You don't have to be able to show that the answer *must be true* according to the information we have from the author. You still need evidence from the author's language, but it doesn't *have to be true*.

Step 2: Analyze the argument You still need to read the passage carefully. This step will be the same as it was with your first Inference question. Pay close attention to qualifying language, underlining key words and jotting down any notes you need to keep things straight. Here's the passage again.

Coffee and tea contain methylxanthines, which cause temporary increases in the natural production of vasopressin, a hormone produced by the pituitary gland. Vasopressin causes clumping of blood cells, and the clumping is more pronounced in women than in men. This is probably the explanation of the fact that women face as much as a tenfold higher risk than men do of complications following angioplasty, a technique used to clear clogged arteries.

To summarize, a substance in coffee and tea increases vasopressin, which, in turn, causes clumping of blood cells. This clumping is more pronounced in women than in men, and may explain why women face a higher risk of complications after angioplasty.

Step 3: Act Remember that on Inference questions, you can't predict with any assurance what the test-writers will look for. Head right to the answer choices and start Step 4. Just be sure to go back to the passage for proof.

Step 4: Answer using Process of Elimination Check out each answer choice in turn and see which ones you can eliminate. Be on the lookout for answers that fall outside of the scope of the information that you've been given or are inconsistent with what you were told, answers that include extreme language, and answers that make unwarranted comparisons. If any part of an answer choice isn't supported, get rid of it. Here we go.

~~A~~

Men, but not women, should be given methylxanthines prior to undergoing angioplasty.

~~B~~

What do you know from the passage? Methylxanthines increase vasopressin, which causes blood cell clumping. Clumping can lead to complications, so it would be bad to give men methylxanthines. Eliminate this choice.

- ☐ B In spite of the risks, angioplasty is the only effective treatment for clogged arteries.

The passage doesn't provide enough information to say that angioplasty is the only effective treatment for clogged arteries. "Only" makes this choice extreme and unsupported. Eliminate it.

- ☐ C Women probably drink more coffee and tea, on average, than do men.

You may be tempted by this at first, since women are at a greater risk for complications than men, but there is no support in the passage that the reason is that women drink more coffee and tea. All you know for sure is that the clumping is more pronounced for women than for men, but not why. Get rid of this one.

- ☐ D Prior to undergoing angioplasty, women should avoid coffee and tea.

What do you know from the passage? Because consuming methylxanthines increases the risk of blood cell clumping, which in turn increases the risk of complications after angioplasty, women would be well advised to avoid coffee and tea before undergoing angioplasty. Keep this one for now.

- ☐ E Angioplasty should not be used to treat clogged arteries.

This goes too far. Though the passage mentions complications of angioplasty, that's not enough to claim that the treatment should not be used. This one should be eliminated too.

There you have it. You found (D), which is the credited response. Notice that you can't say *for sure* that women should avoid coffee and tea before angioplasty, but this is a reasonable inference from the given facts.

In summary, when you have this kind of weaker inference, you have a little bit more latitude. You still need evidence from the passage to support the choice, but you don't have to be able to show that an answer *must be true*.

Arguments Technique: Watch Out for the Word *Support*

The word *support* shows up in two different types of Arguments questions, and you'll need to be able to keep them straight if you hope to approach the questions effectively. Take a look at a couple of sample questions.

Which one of the following, if true, provides the most support for the argument?

The passage provides the most support for which one of the following?

If you're not careful, you might mistakenly think that these two questions ask you to perform the same task. After all, they both talk about support, right? Actually, you have two different tasks here, and if you get them mixed up, you're going to have a difficult time with POE. Examine the first question more closely. Here it is again.

Which one of the following, if true, provides the most support for the argument?

This should look familiar. Care to guess what your task is here? If you identified this as a Strengthen question, bravo! There are two indicators that will help you to properly identify it. First, notice the phrase "if true," referring to "the following," and recall that it is the answers on Strengthen questions that are hypothetically true. Second, notice that you are being asked to find the answer choice that *provides the most support for* the argument. In other words, you're being asked to evaluate the impact that each answer choice has on the author's conclusion. Sound familiar? We hope so.

Here's the second question again.

The passage provides the most support for which one of the following?

Notice the difference here. Aside from the obvious lack of the words *if true*, this question also asks for the support to happen, but *in the other direction*. Here you are asked to find the answer choice that *is best supported by* the passage. That's what you were just doing in the question you worked on a minute ago, so this is an Inference question.

Here, eliminate answers that aren't relevant because the passage doesn't offer enough evidence to support them, a pretty different mode of elimination from that used with Strengthen questions. The words *if true*, when referring to the choices, indicate hypotheticals in the answers, so it won't be an Inference question.



Read Carefully!

"The statements above, if true, provide the most support for which one of the following?" Notice that "if true" refers to "the statements above." Because these statements are being used to support one of the answer choices, this is an *Inference* question, not a *Strengthen* question.



Two things to look for: If the *answer choices* are being used to support the *argument*, you have a Strengthen question. If the *passage* is being used to support one of the *answer choices*, you have an Inference question.

Arguments Technique: Look for Conditional Statements and Find the Contrapositive

Do you know what an “if...then” statement is? If you’ve taken any classes in logic, you might know it as a “conditional statement.” Actually, it’s very simple. Read this sentence.

If you hit a glass with a hammer, the glass will break.

Conditional Statements: Sufficient and Necessary

Once you diagram a conditional statement, use the terms *sufficient* and *necessary* to describe the function of each side of the diagram.

The left side is the sufficient side because it is enough, on its own, to know something else (the right side).

The right side is the necessary side because it is a requirement of something else (the left side).

You can use these terms to take apart and diagram difficult sentences containing conditional language by asking yourself, “Which factor is enough to know something else?” or “Which factor seems to be a requirement of something else?”

When you run across a statement such as this, you can diagram it. A common way to diagram conditional statements is to use a symbol for each element in the statement—here we’ll use “H” for hitting the glass with a hammer and “B” for breaking—and use an arrow to connect them, showing that the action leads directly to the effect. So $H \rightarrow B$ would represent the original statement.

This statement would seem reasonable to most people because it’s what you would expect to happen in the real world. On the LSAT, you have to take this statement as true if it were part of an argument because, as we stated earlier, you have to accept all of the evidence presented in arguments at face value. This is true even when they aren’t things that necessarily make reasonable sense.

With Inference questions, you are often asked to identify another statement—in the form of an answer choice—that also *must be true* if the statements in the argument are accepted as true.